

DRAFT

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

RECREATION AREA IMPROVEMENT

(Acre)  
Code 562

*Photo courtesy of South Florida Water Management District*



**DEFINITION**

Establishing grasses, legumes, vines, shrubs, trees, or other plants or selectively reducing stand density and trimming woody plants to improve an area for recreation.

**PURPOSE**

To increase the attractiveness and usefulness of recreation areas and to protect the soil and plant resources.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On any area planned for recreation use.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria**

Compliance with all federal, state, and local laws is required.

Impacts to cultural resources, Federal and State protected species, and wetlands shall be evaluated during planning, design and implementation of this conservation practice in accord with established National and Florida NRCS policies (General Manual, Title 420-Part 401 and Title 190-Parts 410.22 and 410.26;

National Planning Procedures Handbook, FL Supplements to Parts 600.1 and 600.5).

**Establishment Criteria**

Important landscape design elements that are involved in various recreational plantings consist of plant height, spread, texture, the color of flower, leaf and stem in all seasons, and general plant habit. This includes root characteristics, wildlife habitat values, maintenance requirements, and fire hazard.

Preference should be given to native plants in most settings. However, in heavily used areas or where special characteristics are desirable, non-native plants may better adapt to local situations. Plant hardiness and soil suitability are plant selection factors. No species shall be used that is considered to be a nuisance or invasive species.

Species recommendations for local use are contained in the NRCS Plant Materials Program's "Plant Materials for Wildlife," technical reference, the Conservation Practice Standard Supplement for Pasture and Hayland Planting (Code 512), and the Practice Standard Specifications and Job Sheet for Tree/Shrub Establishment, Code 612, found in Part 636.5 of the National Biology Handbook.

Plants shall be spaced according to the planting plan or specifications. Spacing is determined by many factors including plant height, spread, habit, effect desired, etc.

Planting methods, time of planting, site preparation, etc. will follow the Standard, Supplement and Job Sheet for Tree/Shrub Establishment, Pasture and Hayland Planting, or Critical Area Planting, Code 342, as appropriate.

**Pruning**

Pruning is done to maintain or improve plant vigor, control plant size and form, influence flowering

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

and fruit production, and rejuvenate old plants. Pruning will follow the Standard for Tree/Shrub Pruning, Code 660.

Prune flowering plants such as abelia, hibiscus and rose while dormant or just before spring growth flush. When pruning spring-flowering plants such as azaleas and dogwoods, maximize production of next year's flowers by pruning in late spring. Prune oaks, maples, hickories and other large shade trees during the dormant season to prevent excessive sprouting that results when pruning occurs during the active growth period.

Limbs that overhang trails, paths, and roadways will be pruned to a height of 8 to 12 feet to facilitate movement of people, vehicles, and livestock.

### **Thinning and Removal**

Remove trees that are a hazard to users of the area. Hazard trees are those which are seriously defective, diseased, or in danger of windthrow or toppling.

Remove stumps and debris and fill stump holes to the natural grade. Stumps and debris may be utilized as a source for mulch or may be stacked and used for wildlife habitat enhancement if site conditions permit.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Pruning Considerations**

The primary considerations for pruning are the characteristics of each plant. With most plants, the ideal time to prune is during the dormant season prior to the beginning of new growth. Early flowering shrubs should be pruned shortly after flowering to maintain flower buds for the following season. In general, from the standpoint of plant growth, pruning can be done at practically any time of the year. However, consideration must be given to factors of food supply, flowering period, and winter hardiness. Foliage is necessary for photosynthesis and the pruning of new growth in the spring can be detrimental to subsequent growth and the general condition of the plant. In some instances late summer pruning may promote new growth which will not harden off sufficiently before freezing weather. Also, food reserves will be removed.

The pruning, thinning and removal should be accomplished with consideration to safety factors such as lighting, access to entries and exits, visibility, etc.

When pruning is being considered, determine:

- If the plant will be subject to sun or wind damage;
- If there are other desirable species present which require shade to exist
- How the pruning debris will be properly disposed of

When pruning is being considered to visually enhance an area, determine if:

- The pruning will enhance the area by opening up vistas or screening out undesirable views;
- The pruning will allow the addition of species in the plant community which will provide unique form, color, or texture to an area.

Consider the vegetative response of the tree or shrub being pruned, e.g., will it sucker from the base or send out many new limbs from latent buds?

### **Thinning and Removal Considerations**

Trees and shrubs should be spaced or thinned to meet the needs of the area. In areas of dense shade or poor ventilation, remove trees to decrease shade and increase air circulation.

Remove trees to provide adequate space for trails, toilets, picnic tables, fireplaces, etc. Retain specimen types that have a unique appearance or beauty and are in a protected location.

Favor the retention of thrifty, deep-rooted trees which are resistant to abrasion and traffic damage.

### **Water Quantity Considerations**

Conservation effects on water quantity should be a primary consideration of this practice. Use of native species and plants associated with xeriscapes should be considered.

Increasing vegetative cover by planting new vegetation may decrease runoff and increase infiltration. Where infiltration exceeds evapotranspiration, deep percolation below the root zone may occur.

Decreasing vegetative cover by thinning and/or removal of unwanted vegetation may increase runoff. The increased runoff will decrease over time as the vegetative cover increases.

### **Water Quality Considerations**

Conservation effects on water quality should be a primary consideration of this practice. The long-term effect of applying the practice should be a reduction of nutrients and sediment in surface water. Short-term sediment increases may be noted during and immediately after vegetation establishment due to disturbance of the soil surface and preparation of the seedbed. Measures shall be taken to minimize this effect. Where nutrients and/or pesticides are used, follow practice standards for Nutrient Management, Code 590, and Pest Management, Code 595.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Plans and specifications for improving recreation areas shall be prepared for each field or treatment unit according to the Criteria, Considerations, and Operation & Maintenance described in this standard.

Plans (drawings) shall be prepared indicating the work to be accomplished. Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared using approved practice specifications, job sheets, and a narrative description of prescribed treatments, plant materials, and maintenance measures for each type of recreation area.

### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

An operation and maintenance plan must be prepared by the designer for use by the owner or other parties responsible for this practice. The plan should provide specific instructions to insure that the prescribed conservation measures function properly. It should also include for periodic inspections and prompt repair or replacement of damaged components.

### **REFERENCES**

Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, *List of Invasive Species*, <http://www.fleppc.org/Plantlist/list.htm>

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry, *Noxious Weed List*, <http://doacs.state.fl.us/~pi/5b-57.htm>

NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Critical Area Planting, Code 342
- Pasture and Hayland Planting, Code 512
- Pasture and Hayland Planting, Supplement, Code 512
- Nutrient Management, Code 590
- Pest Management, Code 595
- Tree/Shrub Planting Specifications, Code 612
- Tree/Shrub Planting Job Sheet, Code 612
- Tree/Shrub Pruning, Code 660

"Plant Materials for Wildlife," NRCS Plant Materials Program.